

# Essential services for wildlife care in Australia

## Position Statement

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### Preamble

More information on SARS-CoV-2 and COVID-19, including what is known about risk of infection from humans to animals, is available in the Wildlife Health Australia Fact Sheet “Novel Coronavirus disease (COVID-19)” ([www.wildlifehealthaustralia.com.au/Portals/0/Documents/FactSheets/Public%20health/Novel\\_coronavirus-2019.pdf](http://www.wildlifehealthaustralia.com.au/Portals/0/Documents/FactSheets/Public%20health/Novel_coronavirus-2019.pdf)).

There is no evidence of SARS-CoV-2 virus in Australian wildlife and no evidence to suggest any animals in Australia might be a source of COVID-19 infection for humans. It is safest to assume that any mammal wildlife species may have the potential to be infected with SARS-CoV-2 from close exposure to an infected human .

Appropriate precautions are always recommended before, during and after contact with animals (see [National Wildlife Biosecurity Guidelines](#)).

People diagnosed with COVID-19 should not have any contact with Australian wildlife. If you care for wildlife, you should have a plan in place for the animals in your care in the event you become sick or have to self-isolate.

### WHA Position Statement on essential services for wildlife care

Wildlife Health Australia (WHA) considers that many of the people in Australia who care for wildlife in both paid and voluntary positions should be recognised as “essential workers”. Wildlife Health Australia urges the Australian and state and territory governments to officially recognise those workers in roles related to wildlife care as essential services during the COVID-19 response.

Wildlife care workers play a vital role in caring for Australia’s unique and valued wildlife. Wildlife require care because they are orphaned, abandoned, displaced, injured, stranded, entangled or sick. These animals need food, shelter, care, veterinary diagnostics and treatment, maintenance of their temporary environment and enrichment, in some cases on a long-term basis. Free-ranging wildlife may need intervention or management.

This sector seeks government assurance that in the event of COVID-19 related restrictions, these workers will be allowed to attend to the essential needs of these animals, whether in an animal care facility, in the outdoors or in their own homes.

These animal care roles (whether voluntary or employed) include:

**1. Those looking after wildlife in rehabilitation or “care” settings (temporary or permanently captive situations)**

- Wildlife carers and keeping/ nursing/ support staff providing direct wildlife care and enrichment
- Animal food teams (including food preparation, collection and equipment) and remote collection of koala browse, blossom for possums etc.
- Animal food suppliers and workers managing supply chains
- Veterinarians, vet nurses, lab technicians/diagnostics, veterinary pathologists, health records and other animal health roles
- Maintenance workers, horticulturists and other roles maintaining animal habitats and necessary equipment
- Sanitary workers maintaining hygienic spaces for human and animal health
- Facility managers and animal records managers
- Vehicle drivers and assistants
- Security staff
- Other staff seconded to perform animal care tasks.

**2. Wildlife events and emergencies**

- People responding to situations such as marine mammal stranding or entanglements, mass poisoning or deaths of wildlife, a disease outbreak or event, disposal of wildlife carcasses (e.g. mass cetacean stranding).
- This includes a wide range of roles as mentioned in 1. above, as well as machinery, boat and vehicle operators, emergency services personnel, crowd-controllers and an incident control team.

Many of these events occur outdoors, but some may require personnel to work in close proximity.

**3. Wildlife management for welfare and conservation**

Ongoing management of free-ranging wildlife may be required for welfare and conservation purposes. This might include:

- Management of wildlife populations (e.g. mange or other disease treatment programs, bird and bat banding, providing food to bushfire affected populations or habituated wildlife populations)
- Monitoring and providing provisions for wildlife post translocation or during field studies
- Predator management
- Wildlife enclosure fence monitoring and repair
- Responding to injured/sick wildlife to provide care or reduce suffering.

Many of these events occur outdoors, but some may require personnel to work in close proximity.

## **Risk management**

Everyone providing care for wildlife should assess and manage the risk of COVID-19 transmission between workers, and from workers to animals. WHA recommends monitoring the situation and incorporating current advice from National and State Government authorities, including the relevant Departments of human and animal health. Additional information can be found in the WHA Fact Sheet “[Novel Coronavirus Disease \(COVID-19\)](#)”. Other disease risks and safety risks should be assessed and managed appropriately.

## **The National Wildlife Biosecurity Guidelines**

([www.wildlifehealthaustralia.com.au/AboutUs/News/NationalWildlifeBiosecurityGuidelinesreleased.aspx](http://www.wildlifehealthaustralia.com.au/AboutUs/News/NationalWildlifeBiosecurityGuidelinesreleased.aspx))

provide detailed information on how to manage human and animal health and biosecurity when working with wildlife.

## **Who is Wildlife Health Australia?**

Wildlife Health Australia is the coordinating body for wildlife health in Australia. Our principal objectives are the protection and enhancement of the natural environment. We undertake research, investigate and monitor wildlife diseases in Australia. Find out more at [www.wildlifehealthaustralia.com.au](http://www.wildlifehealthaustralia.com.au)

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